

BEDTIME STORIES Mrs. Benjamin Spock Read to Her Sons

JACK and JILL

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Pirate Story by TV's Dennis the Menace



A CHINESE PLAY



BY NANCY FORD



A one-act play based on an old legend

Those who take part: Almond Flower and Peach Blossom (two little Chinese wives), Mother-in-law, and Ching Lee (the gardener).

The play takes place in the courtyard of a wealthy home. There is a wall around the courtyard shown by pots of flowers in a row near the front of the stage. A gateway in the wall is marked by two boxes and in the courtyard is a large garden chair or bench.

As the play opens Ching Lee comes in. He carries a water jar and ladle. He sets the jar down near the gate and begins to water the flowers. Peach Blossom (weeping) and Almond Flower come in.

PEACH BLOSSOM . . I'm so homesick. If only I could see my mother and father, my brothers and little sisters again!

ALMOND FLOWER . . Do not cry, dear Peach Blossom. I, too, long to see my parents again, but Honorable Mother-in-law never allows us to go anywhere.

PEACH BLOSSOM . . She says our place is in the home of our husbands. But I should be happier if I were allowed just a small visit with my loved ones.

ALMOND FLOWER . . Sh! Honorable Mother-in-law would be very angry if she heard us speak this way.

PEACH BLOSSOM . . There is no fear of that. The old one is asleep. I sang and sang to her until she dozed off. My poor throat is quite sore from so much singing.

ALMOND FLOWER . . If only we could slip away while Honorable Mother-in-law sleeps!

CHING LEE *(Looks up from his flowers.)* Be careful, little wives. Honorable Mother-in-law must be obeyed. That is ancient Chinese custom.

PEACH BLOSSOM At least, Ching Lee, let us peek through the gate. Our old homes are just down the road. *(Girls brush past gardener to stare through the gate. Ching Lee steps back, upsetting water jug, which falls with a clatter. (Almond Flower and Peach Blossom jump back, frightened, as Honorable Mother-in-law comes in.)*

MOTHER-IN-LAW *(Scolding)* Can't you two naughty girls let me have my nap in peace? What are you up to now? Ah, I see. You are running away, and my faithful Ching Lee has stopped you.

PEACH BLOSSOM *(Crying)* No, no, Honorable Mother-in-law. We love our husbands too much to run away.

ALMOND FLOWER *(Crying, but trying to speak bravely.)* We were only looking through the gate at our old homes. Please, Honorable Mother-in-law, give us your gracious permission to visit our parents?

MOTHER-IN-LAW *(Severely)* Foolish young wives must learn contentment. *(Ching Lee shakes head and turns back to his flowers.)*

ALMOND FLOWER We would do anything to see our parents again.

PEACH BLOSSOM Anything, dear Mother of our husbands!

MOTHER-IN-LAW Anything! Silly girls! You have many things to learn and it is my duty to teach you. Now I shall teach you how foolish it is to make rash promises. *(Almond Flower and Peach Blossom look frightened.)* You shall have my gracious permission to visit the homes of your parents on this condition. You, Almond Flower, must bring me a paper full of fire. And you, Peach Blossom, shall present me with wind in a paper. *(Honorable Mother-in-law frowns and stalks off.)*

PEACH BLOSSOM . . . *(In despair)* A paper full of wind!

ALMOND FLOWER . . . A paper full of fire! *(They both begin to cry, sobbing loudly.)*
Did you hear that, Ching Lee? Did you hear our
cruel, cruel Honorable Mother-in-law?

CHING LEE I heard, little wives.

PEACH BLOSSOM . . . We shall never see our parents! No one could
put fire in a paper. The paper would burn.

ALMOND FLOWER . . . Or catch the wind and wrap it in a paper!

CHING LEE Honorable Mother-in-law very wise woman. Now
she wishes to teach little lesson. Wind in paper
and fire in paper! These are riddles. But perhaps
old Ching Lee knows their answers.

PEACH BLOSSOM . . . Dear Ching Lee, tell us. Please, please tell us.



- CHING LEE Dry your tears and listen, little wives. *(The girls run to listen as Ching Lee whispers to them.)*
- ALMOND FLOWER . . Dear Ching Lee! However did you guess the answers to Honorable Mother-in-law's riddles?
- PEACH BLOSSOM . . Thank you, dear kind Ching Lee, for helping us.
- CHING LEE Honorable Mother-in-law very strict, but never known to break word. Try my plan, little wives, and see what happens. *(The two girls giggle and run off. In a moment they return, each one hiding something behind her back.)*
- PEACH BLOSSOM . . Go quickly, Ching Lee, and tell our Honorable Mother-in-law that we wish to present her with the impossible gifts. *(Ching Lee grins and shuffles off. He comes back almost at once, followed by Honorable Mother-in-law.)*
- MOTHER-IN-LAW . . *(Scowling)* Those naughty girls again! The day is too hot for me to keep running after two troublesome little wives. *(Turns to girls.)* Your husbands shall hear how you have plagued me. *(Sinks down on the garden chair.)*
- ALMOND FLOWER . . Please, Honorable Mother-in-law, allow your two dutiful daughters to present their gifts.
- MOTHER-IN-LAW . . *(Crossly)* What nonsense have you thought up now?
- PEACH BLOSSOM . . *(She tiptoes over to stand behind Honorable Mother-in-law, takes a paper fan from behind her back and fans the old woman's cheek.)* Now see, Honorable Mother-in-law, wind in paper!
- MOTHER-IN-LAW . . *(Looks up, surprised, at the fan, then nods.)* Yes, my child. This is truly wind in paper that you have brought to me. *(She takes the fan from Peach Blossom and fans herself.)* Very welcome it is on a hot day. *(She turns to Almond Flower.)* And what are you hiding behind your back?
- ALMOND FLOWER . . If you please, Honorable Mother-in-law. *(She holds up paper Chinese lantern.)* Fire in paper!

MOTHER-IN-LAW . . Fire in paper—so it is. *(She nods.)* And very pretty, too. *(She is smiling.)* And now I suppose you want me to keep my part of the bargain?

PEACH BLOSSOM . . Please, a little visit with our own dear parents.

MOTHER-IN-LAW . . Remember, just a little visit. Then you must hurry back. A wife's place is in her husband's home and my sons must not be kept waiting for their suppers.

ALMOND FLOWER . . We will hurry. *(She kisses Honorable Mother-in-law's cheek.)*

PEACH BLOSSOM . . We'll remember. *(Kisses Honorable Mother-in-law, then takes Almond Flower's hand and the girls start to run toward the gate.)*

MOTHER-IN-LAW . . Wait! You must be suitably attended. It is not proper for young wives to go alone through the streets, nor is it safe. Ching Lee will go with you. *(Ching Lee bows and stands aside as the girls go out the gate, blowing kisses to Honorable Mother-in-law. Honorable Mother-in-law examines the lantern with admiration and fans herself with the fan as the play ends.)*



PICTURES BY JOY TROTH